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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002984

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LOCAL MEDIA REPORTS - NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA TO SIGN MILITARY PACT

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5 (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Press reporting from "The Guardian" newspaper on November 21, repeated in para 2, indicates that Nigeria and South Africa will sign a military pact. The pact apparently will focus on naval cooperation, primarily training, maintenance and joint exercises, and joint patrol of the South Atlantic. It is somewhat ironic that Nigerian Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Samuel Afolayan, used a comparison with South Africa's smaller navy to argue for additional resources for Nigeria's navy, which is seriously overstuffed but has no operational, ocean-going vessels. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Begin article text:

"Nigeria, South Africa to sign military pact"

NIGERIA and South Africa will soon sign a military pact that will streamline the areas of co-operation between their armed forces. The Chief of Defense Staff, Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi who disclosed this when the Chief of South African Navy, Vice Admiral John Relief visited him in Abuja, said some aspects of the program were being implemented.

Already, a Nigerian Lieutenant Colonel is a member of the Directing Staff at the South African Command and Staff College. Also, Nigeria is to start the exchange of cadets with the South African Defense Academy.

Vice Admiral Relief in explaining the scope of the relationship between the two countries stated that "what is important is that between Nigeria and South Africa, we have the best Navies in Africa. The first level of co-operation is in the area of training. Second is the repairing of warships and the conduct of joint exercises between both countries. We both support the new African Initiative and Millennium plan. We have ability to build relations together."

Both Nigeria and South Africa, according to Relief, are desirous of providing security in the South Atlantic. According to him: "The South Atlantic is a very important sea route to South Africa. We share the coast with Namibia and Angola. It is being mined for diamonds and natural gas. There are lots of natural resources that will tempt people there. A strong Navy will guarantee the safety of the areas. Currently, there is no threat, but that doesn't mean that in the unsure world we are, things might not change."

Chief of Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Samuel Afolayan who in October visited South Africa, said the international community attached great importance to the security of the South Atlantic and the co-operation between Nigeria and South African Navies. Said he: "It is a good expectation that after my visit to South Africa, I followed it up with a visit to the United States and the safety of the South Atlantic was what we discussed. They were delighted that we are concerned with the geo-political consideration of the zone. They are eager to note and see such developments going on in the African continent."

Afolayan advocated increased funding and re-equipping of the Nigerian Navy to meet up with the challenges of the new democracy.

He stated: "With the South African Navy that is small, compact and efficient, we see the need for the Nigerian Navy to be better equipped than what it is now. They have capabilities yet to be possessed by the Nigerian Navy. We will get those capabilities if we are re-equipped."

The South African Navy has about 5,500 uniformed personnel

and 2000 civilians. It has two naval bases, a dockyard, nine combat craft, three sub-marines, six minesweepers and four corvettes.

13. (C) COMMENT: Bilateral military cooperation between Nigeria and South Africa is likely to be beneficial to Nigeria, and to U.S. goals for Nigeria's military. At times, African states accept notions of military reform more readily from another African State rather than the West. It is somewhat ironic (but unfortunately normal), however, that Nigerian Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Samuel Afolayan, used the South African visit as an opportunity to argue for additional resources for Nigeria's Navy, rather than using the visit as an opportunity to advocate for a more streamlined Service. The Naval Service is top-heavy and personnel-laden (19 Admirals and 34 Commodores and less than 10,000 men) but has no operational ocean-going vessels.

14. (C) The Nigerian Navy tends to think big, voicing a need for submarines and aircraft carriers to the DATT. However, its capabilities are small. A Nigerian Navy without fundamental defense reform is not likely to achieve anything beyond coastal patrol, and that achievement is likely only because the U.S. is providing the wherewithal (Balsam-class 180' patrol vessels). END COMMENT.
Jeter